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Unmanned plane studying climate

A strange-looking, small airplane flying over north-central Oklahoma this month is part of the U.S. Energy Department's atmospheric radiation measurement program. The plane's data on energy flowing to and from the earth will be used to improve computer programs that predict climatic changes. The plane is flying from the Blackwell-Tonkawa Municipal Airport.



GNAT 750-45 airplane made by General Atomics

Instruments on top of plane measure solar energy reaching the earth.

Video pictures and data are radioed from plane to the ground.

Instruments on bottom measure infrared radiation from the ground.

Wing span 35 feet
Length 15 feet
Propeller in rear

Pilots control the plane by radio from a trailer on the ground.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy, Sandia National Laboratories

By Marcia Staimer, USA TODAY